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NEWS — 2026 TOWN ELECTIONS

John Bellaire, 22, among youngest townwide winners in Winchester history

He won all eight precincts after a door-to-door campaign that emphasized direct voter contact over institutional backing.

WILL DOWD | STAFF WRITER

March 25, 2026 . 11:57 AM — 3 min read

John Bellaire speaks during a gathering in Winchester. Bellaire, 22, was elected to the Winchester Committee and is believed among the youngest candidates elected to townwide office in Winch
COURTESY PHOTO / BELLAIRE FOR SCHOOL COMMITTEE

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John Bellaire knocked on more than 1,300 doors in Winchester, across all eight precincts, raised money from more than 100 donors and generated more than 150,000 views on social media.

On Election Day, March 21, the 22-year-old defeated Heather von Mering, 2,166 to 1,841, to win a seat on the Winchester School Committee.

Select Board member Bill McGonigle, who has served in Winchester government for years, said he could not recall such a precedent.

“To the best of my knowledge, we’ve never had a townwide elected official as young as John Bellaire,” McGonigle said.

Bellaire, who began campaigning in December, won every precinct on the ballot.

He carried Precinct 1 by a margin of 334 to 216, led in Precinct 3 with 322 votes to von Mering’s 300 and held an edge even in precincts where the override question struggled. In Precinct 5, where voters rejected the override nearly two to one, Bellaire still outpaced von Mering, 266 to 218.

Bellaire told the Winchester News his campaign was built on direct contact with voters rather than institutional support.

“My campaign was truly a grassroots team effort, and I am so grateful to our extensive team of supporters and volunteers,” Bellaire said. “We knocked on 1,300+ doors across all eight precincts, received donations from 100+ supporters, had over 150,000 views on social media, and listened to the stories and experiences of many students, parents, and educators.”

He takes office at a moment when the committee’s work will be s
almost entirely by Saturday’s other result. The $11.5 million Proposition 2

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1/2 override that would have funded school operations and capital needs failed, 2,558 to 2,265.

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McGonigle estimated 30 to 40 school layoffs are likely. He said the committee now faces a direct trade-off between maintaining staff and funding a new elementary literacy curriculum.

Bellaire signaled he intends to push for the curriculum regardless.

“With the override failing…the School Committee will need to work diligently to ensure we optimize our budget amidst a tightened fiscal environment,” Bellaire said. “I will work collaboratively to ensure that Town Meeting appropriates funds for the new elementary literacy curriculum this spring.”

He said he also plans to pursue what he described as low-cost, high-impact changes in technology, financial literacy and school culture.

“I encourage residents to reach out with questions, opinions and concerns as the School Committee navigates reductions required by the override outcome,” Bellaire said.

McGonigle, who supported both Bellaire and von Mering during the campaign, said Bellaire’s analytical approach could prove useful given the fiscal landscape.

“One thing that’s good about John is he is a very analytical person,” McGonigle said, “and given that we’re in a bunch of crisis now, that’s necessary.”

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Bellaire's first test will come at Town Meeting this spring, where the literacy curriculum funding he has prioritized will compete against a budget already under severe pressure.

McGonigle said the schools may also have to consider redistricting and consolidating elementary buildings to find savings — decisions that would fall to the committee Bellaire is about to join.

"I'm thrilled to be joining Winchester's School Committee, and am eager to hit the ground running to deliver for our students," Bellaire said. "I am grateful for this opportunity, and I will not let our students down."

Will Dowd is a Massachusetts journalist who covers municipal government and community life for Winchester News. He runs The Marblehead Independent, a reader-funded digital newsroom.

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NEWS

Winchester ZBA waives town regulations to move Washington/Swanton project along

Town officials have approved waivers of regulations for a residential/commercial development project at Washington and Swanton streets. The Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) on March 19 approved the waivers for a 40B project at 278-292 Washington St. and 12 and 16-20 Swanton St. in a special meeting preceding a

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2026 TOWN ELECTIONS

13 YEARS OF DATA, ONE SATURDAY: Takeaways from Winchester's override vote and the races that surrounded it

Winchester News reviewed precinct-level election results from every annual town election since 2014 — 13 years of data covering turnout, ballot questions, Select Board races, School Committee contests and Planning Board results — and compared them against the March 21 preliminary numbers. The 2026 results have not yet been certified by Town

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NEWS

With override rejected, Winchester shifts from campaigning to budget planning

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Third No Kings Rally Winchester, Medford March 28

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After Winchester voters rejected an $11.5 million Proposition 2 1/2 override on Election Day, March 21, the governing question in town has shifted from persuasion to arithmetic. Select Board member Bill McGonigle, who served on the Yes for Winchester campaign, said the defeat has changed how he approaches

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Winchester will hold its third No Kings rally this weekend and include a new addition to its program – a community walk toward town before the rally. Organizers of Winchester's third No Kings rally hope to draw in more than 1,000 people to the March 28 event. Other rallies

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EVENTS

Network for Social Justice to celebrate 35th anniversary

The following was submitted by the Network for Social Justice: The Network For Social Justice turns 35 this spring! There will be a celebration on Saturday, April 11, from 7-9:30 p.m., at the Sons of Italy, 117 Swanton St., Winchester. Connect with your local friends and neighbors as

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EVENTS

Winchester Community Music School presents Jazz Jam Session

The following was submitted by the Winchester Community Music School: On Saturday, March 28, join the community at Winchester Community Music School, 407 Highland Ave., for a Jazz Jam Session, an afternoon of fun, spontaneous jazz playing, beginning at 3 p.m. Instrumentalists and vocalists of all skill levels are

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